

THE THREE PRINCES

When war comes anything that floats has its value and when war is going as badly as was the case in 1940, ships that once seemed ugly ducklings became swans indeed. There were in Canadian waters three identical small liners built in 1930; Prince Robert and Prince David owned by Canadian National Steamships, and the North Star (the former Prince Henry) owned by Clarke Steamships. They were 385 feet long, displaced ^{5,736} 6000 tons, and had a top speed clean of 22 knots. Their range was limited. (They had been built for the coasting trade ~~because~~ ^{as} their endurance at economical speed was ~~over~~ ^{about} 6000 miles).

The R.C.N. obtained the three Princes in 1940 and began their conversion to Armed Merchant Cruisers. DAVID and ROBERT were done by Halifax Shipyards and Burrard Dry Dock Co. respectively commencing Feb., 1940; Canadian Vickers started HENRY in May. PRINCE ROBERT was ready by mid-summer but the others, which were in poorer condition, did not complete until the end of the year. The total cost was about \$2,300,000.

The conversion was extensive: in addition to repairing machinery and hull, watertight security had to be improved, stiffening had to be provided for the armament, accommodation had to be greatly altered, and the superstructure had to be radically changed by cutting away the two upper decks and substituting the superstructure of a light cruiser. Then the guns were added: two old Admiralty six-inch guns forward and aft, two three-inch High Angle guns amidships, a scattering of light anti-aircraft weapons here and there, and depth charges right aft. No one ever regarded the Princes as good gunnery ships: their weapons were very old and they rolled abominably.

H.M.C.S. PRINCE ROBERT (Cdr. C. T. Beard, R.C.N.) became operational in Sept., 1940, and was sent off to Mexican waters to watch the German merchantman WESER (pronounced VAYZER). After dark on the 25th of September, WESER sailed from Manzanillo. PRINCE ROBERT effectively concealed by a lighthouse and high land in the background, remained undetected

and was able to slip along in the German's wake until territorial waters had been left behind. Then suddenly out of the darkness she appeared with a searchlight, crisp orders and a boarding party. The WESER was prevented from scuttling and brought home in prize, the first important Canadian capture of the ^{war (?)} ~~water~~. WESER became the VANCOUVER ISLAND and sailed for the Allies until she was torpedoed in the North Atlantic.

After further patrols in tropic waters PRINCE ROBERT escorted several groups of Australian and New Zealand airmen to Canada for the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan and guarded H. M. transport AWATEA carrying Canadian troops to Hong Kong in October and November 1941. On the return voyage she sailed from Honolulu 4th December and reached Esquimalt on the 10th. A newspaper report that she sighted the Japanese fleet which attacked Pearl Harbour is without foundation in fact.

H.M.C.S. PRINCE HENRY was ready for war in December, 1940. Under the command of ^{Comm} Capt. R. I. Agnew, O.B.E., R.C.N., she joined the R.N. cruiser DIOMEDE in Peruvian waters to watch German merchantmen in port. After dark on the 31st of March, 1941, the HERMONTHIS and the MUENCHEN sailed from Callao. PRINCE HENRY caught both of them in due course only to have them scuttled by the prepared enemy.

H.M.C.S. PRINCE DAVID completed her conversion in December, 1940, and went to sea under Cdr. W. B. Armit, R.C.N.R. Her early tasks were convoy and patrol in the Caribbean and Pacific where she and HENRY relieved each other.

In June, 1942, the Japanese, still superior at sea, moved an occupying force to the islands of Attu and Kiska in the Aleutian chain. To the United States and Canadian Governments, as well as to the general public, this represented a threat to North America that had to be met vigorously. The United States reacted quickly and moved considerable forces into the area. Convoys operated between Dutch Harbour and Kodiak in support. On the 20th ^{Insert} of August, 1942, the three Canadian PRINCES and the Corvettes DAWSON (A/Lt.-Cdr. A. H. G. Storrs, R.C.N.R.) and VANCOUVER (Lt. P. F. M. DeFreitas, R.C.N.R.) sailed from Esquimalt to place themselves under the orders of the United States Navy at Kodiak.

In retrospect, the Aleutian campaign seems ^{a little unreal} ~~a sort of joke~~. The Japanese were never encountered ^{at all} and it was later learned that they with-

drew soon after their initial landing with the result that the Allies were attacking ghosts. However, the sea is no ghost--it is a constant and implacable enemy to be seen at its worst in the North Pacific. There is no record that anyone really enjoyed the Aleutian campaign: convoying in fog or under the lash of the "Williwaw" as the local gale is known is not the stuff of which pleasant memories are created. Radar was not then the wonderful navigational instrument we have today, the enemy was believed to be around every point and the weather never relented. The end of October came at last to release the Canadian ships and send them home when the absence of Japanese was completely demonstrated.

In the meantime important policy decisions affecting the PRINCES had been taken in Ottawa. It had been decided that they could not function efficiently as Armed Merchant Cruisers and it was accordingly recommended that ROBERT be converted to an auxiliary anti-aircraft cruiser and the DAVID and HENRY to Landing Ships Infantry (^{Medium}Minor). Approval for these recommendations was given in January, 1943, and the ships were turned over to the Burrard Dry Dock Co. in Vancouver.

PRINCE ROBERT recommissioned as an auxiliary A/A ship 7th June, 1943. Her new armament consisted of ten HA/LA (High Angle - Low Angle) four-inch guns in twin mountings, two quadruple two pounder pom-poms or "Chicago pianos" as they were sometimes termed and a dozen oerlikons. This was a formidable armament indeed which enabled the ROBERT to operate with confidence against German air attacks on our shipping. She was sent to Gibraltar to escort fast troop convoys and had several exciting contacts with the enemy especially ~~mm~~ with planes carrying glider bombs or "Chase me Charlie's" as they were known.

By June, 1945, the ROBERT had come home, completed a long refit and prepared herself for the Pacific war. She sailed for Sydney, Australia to join the British Pacific Fleet under Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser and arrived in time ~~mm~~ to be attached to the Task Force sent to relieve Hong Kong. On V.J. Day Sydney harbour saw Admiral Harcourt flying his flag in Indomitable sail as AC II with a strong force of carriers, cruisers, destroyers, submarines, sweepers and other craft to release the

Caps.

military and civilian prisoners in Hong Kong and to accept the Japanese surrender of the colony. Of this force PRINCE ROBERT formed part and though hard-pressed to keep up she managed to be there when Hong Kong was entered 30th August, 1945. The delay was caused by stops at Manus, Lingayen Gulf and Subic Bay for supplies and political discussions. The latter arose because the U.S.A. had laid down that China would accept the Japanese surrender throughout her territory. The Chinese naturally saw in this a golden opportunity to gain Hong Kong particularly in view of their successes arising out of American help in the matter of Shanghai and other foreign-controlled centres along the coast. However the British Government stoutly maintained its legal claim to the colony and the Task Force was finally told to proceed.

Entry had to be on the basis of arms. The Japanese garrison numbering 21,000, including civilians, had not surrendered; about sixty suicide-boats were reported; a few serviceable aircraft had been sighted. Worst of all were the mines: to the British and Japanese fields, which were reasonably well plotted, had to be added the mines sown by air in unknown numbers and locations. After the suicide-boats had been silenced by the Fleet Air Arm, Kaitak air field was entered by plane and negotiations began with the Japanese. It must be the first time in history that an enemy Chief-of-Staff was brought to an ^A admiral by aeroplane on board a carrier, given his terms and then flown back again to his General. The minesweepers searched out a passage through Lie-mun and the first ships wearing the White Ensign to come to Hong Kong for nearly four years steamed slowly through the lane marked by dan buoys.

Among these was H.M.C.S. PRINCE ROBERT. She secured on the Kowloon side and landed a party to open the prisoner-of-war camp at Sham Shui Po where 1500 officers and men, including about 375 Canadians, were awaiting release. Canada and the Canadian Navy were very welcome that day! The ship gave comfort and shelter to many of the inmates and shortly took some of them back to Canada.

The formal Japanese surrender took place mid-September. In the meantime Victoria Island had first been cleared and then the Japanese had been placed in their own POW camps--Sham Shui Po and Argyle Street--

and the war criminals and traitors had been lodged in special sections of Stanley Prison which the Japanese had used to house their civilian internees. A military government was set up after H.M.C.S. ONTARIO (Capt. H. ^{T. W.} Grant, ^{D.S.O.,} R.C.N.) arrived with the new money and with General Festing and his staff. There seemed no reason for PRINCE ROBERT to stay so she sailed for Esquimalt and was paid off soon after her arrival.

Commanding Officers of H.M.C.S. PRINCE ROBERT--Armed Merchant Cruiser (converted to) Auxiliary A/A Ship were:

Cdr. C. T. Beard, R.C.N.	3 Apl., 1940	7 Oct., 1940
Cdr. F. G. Hart, R.C.N.	8 Oct., 1940	21 June, 1942
A/Capt. F. L. Houghton, R.C.N.	22 June, 1942	31 Dec., 1942
Cdr. O. C. S. Robertson, R.C.N.	1 Jan., 1943	23 Mch., 1943
Lt.-Cdr. E. W. Finch-Noyes, R.C.N.	24 Mch., 1943	5 June, 1943
Capt. A. M. Hope, R.C.N.	6 June, 1943	7 Dec., 1944
Capt. W. B. Creery, R.C.N.	8 Dec., 1944	19 Dec., 1944
Capt. W. B. Creery, R.C.N.	4 June, 1945	2 Oct., 1945

H.M.C.S. PRINCE DAVID and H.M.C.S. PRINCE HENRY were recommissioned as L.S.I.(M)'s 20th Dec., 1943, and 6th Jan., 1944, respectively. They had four four-inch twin HA/LA guns, two single Bofors and ten oerlikons. They were fitted to carry eight minor landing craft and to provide for some 550 Army officers and men in addition to their own complement of thirty-one officers and three hundred and twenty-two men.

In February, 1944, PRINCE HENRY and PRINCE DAVID arrived in the Clyde, prepared to receive their Landing Craft Assault (L.C.A.'s) and proceeded to the Isle of Wight to stand ready for operation Neptune-- the code name given to the maritime side of the allied invasion of Normandy.

The beach to be used as the invasion point had been divided into five sectors, one of which was labelled Juno. PRINCE HENRY was senior landing ship of Force J and PRINCE DAVID senior ship of one of the divisions of Force J. The twenty-two landing ships in the Force were to proceed by swept channels to the beaches in their sector and put their landing craft in position to take the troops ashore. HENRY carried the eight L.C.A.'s of the 528th Canadian Flotilla, DAVID the six craft of the 529th Canadian Flotilla and two R.N. craft. During April and May

the forces assembled and practised for the greatest sea-borne invasion ever attempted--some six thousand craft moving in a narrow sector with guard-like precision against an enemy coast defended by every device ingenuity could devise.

D-day came with its excitement, its successes and its casualties. The PRINCES put their L.C.A.'s in position, recovered the survivors, picked up casualties and returned on the 7th to England. Because our casualties both in men and in ships had been lighter than plans had to bargain for, the build-up of our forces in Normandy proceeded at a different pace than expected and the HENRY and DAVID found only casual employment during the next weeks. However, they made the hazardous crossing several times and transported about 5,500 troops to the beaches.

In mid-July the two ships were withdrawn to prepare for an operation in the Mediterranean. One of Sir Winston Churchill's cherished plans was to attack the Nazis from the Mediterranean. The U.S.A. insisted on an attack across the English Channel. However, when "Overlord" proved so successful, it was agreed to release certain units for an attack on Southern France, called operation "DRAGOON."

During the night of 14th-15th August, PRINCE HENRY acting as the flagship of Rear-Admiral T. E. Chandler, U.S.N. and PRINCE DAVID serving as the headquarters ship of a British naval staff approached the Riviera near Toulon. The attack and subsequent build-up were so successful that the two PRINCES were withdrawn to other areas.

In September and October DAVID and HENRY played important parts in the re-occupation of Greece culminating on the 15th of October in the return of the Prime Minister and other members of the government-in-exile embarked in H.M.C.S. PRINCE DAVID with the Greek national flag at the fore. Their welcome was overwhelming and triumphant. It was, therefore, all the more heartrending to see the country torn by civil strife before the end of the year. The last melancholy services provided by the Canadian ships in Greece were to assist refugees and to alleviate suffering.

While planning for the war against Japan had envisaged using PRINCE HENRY and PRINCE DAVID in combined operations probably in south-east Asia;

however, the Canadian Cabinet decided that Canadian ships would be employed only in the Pacific and that only a limited number of officers and men would be available. As a result of this decision, the Admiralty asked the Canadian Government for the loan of the two PRINCES to be manned by the Royal Navy and used in south-east Asia. Hence on the 16th of April, 1945, PRINCE HENRY was transferred to the R.N. In the end PRINCE DAVID was not transferred but returned to Canada and was paid off on the 7th of January, 1946.

Commanding Officers of H.M.C.S. PRINCE HENRY--Armed Merchant Cruiser

(converted to) Landing Ship Infantry were:

Lt.-Cdr. A. R. E. Coleman, R.C.N.R.	25 May, 1940	7 Aug., 1940
Capt. R. I. Agnew, O.B.E., R.C.N.	8 Aug., 1940	19 Dec., 1941
Capt. J. C. I. Edwards, R.C.N.	20 Dec., 1941	31 Dec., 1942
Capt. F. L. Houghton, R.C.N.	1 Jan., 1943	18 Mch., 1943
Lt.-Cdr. E. W. Finch-Noyes, R.C.N.	19 Mch., 1943	22 Mch., 1943
Lt.-Cdr. T. K. Young, R.C.N.R.	23 Mch., 1943	23 May, 1943
Cdr. T. D. Kelly, R.C.N.R.	24 May, 1943	29 Nov., 1943
Cdr. K. F. Adams, R.C.N.	30 Nov., 1943	11 Dec., 1943
Capt. V. S. Godfrey, R.C.N.	12 Dec., 1943	16 Apl., 1945

Commanding Officers of H.M.C.S. PRINCE DAVID--Armed Merchant Cruiser

(converted to) Landing Ship Infantry were:

Cdr. W. B. Armit, R.C.N.R.	5 Feb., 1940	24 Mch., 1941
Cdr. K. F. Adams, R.C.N.	25 Mch., 1941	1 Dec., 1941
Capt. V. S. Godfrey, R.C.N.	2 Dec., 1941	18 Mch., 1942
A/Lt.-Cdr. T. D. Kelly, R.C.N.R.	19 Mch., 1942	16 Apl., 1942
Capt. V. S. Godfrey, R.C.N.	17 Apl., 1942	17 Apl., 1943
Cdr. T. D. Kelly, R.C.N.R.	18 Apl., 1943	1 May, 1943
Cdr. T. D. Kelly, R.C.N.R.	23 May, 1943	3 Dec., 1945